

Congressmen Urge State Department to Return Vietnam to List of Human Rights Violators

By Jane McGrath

<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/71368>

The congressional human rights panel also heard testimony from Ted Van Der Meid, commissioner at the bipartisan **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**, which Congress created in 1998 as part of the International Religious Freedom Act to examine and analyze the state of religious freedom in countries around the world.

“Sadly, we cannot conclude that religious freedom conditions have improved markedly in recent years,” Van Der Meid said in his written testimony. “Vietnam continues to backslide on human rights and there remain too many religious freedom violations, too many individuals detained for independent religious activity or peaceful religious freedom advocacy, too many cases of discrimination and forced renunciations of faith targeting new converts to Protestantism, and too many stories of government approved violence targeting Buddhists and Catholics.”

Van Der Meid said the Con Dau case is similar to a number of violent clashes between the Catholic Church and the Vietnamese government over property rights. “In the last several years, disputes over religious property have led to harassment, property destruction, detention, and violence, sometimes by ‘contract thugs’ hired by the government to break up peaceful prayer vigils,” he said. “In addition, lawyers for those detained at peaceful prayer vigils have been intimidated and briefly detained.”